

# starting out: the sicilian

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EVERETT COLLECTION

EVERYMAN CHESS

First published 2002 by Everyman Publishers plc (formerly Corgus Books plc)  
Gloucester Mansions, 145A Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8EP

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**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 1 85744 249 0

Distributed in North America by The Globe Pequot Press, P.O. Box 480,  
246 Goose Lane, Guilford, CT 06437 0480

All other sales enquiries should be directed to Everyman Chess, Gloucester  
Mansions, 145A Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8HD

tel: 020 7639 1800 fax: 020 7379 4680

email: [chess@everymanbooks.com](mailto:chess@everymanbooks.com)

website: [www.everymanbooks.com](http://www.everymanbooks.com)

**EVERYMAN CHESS SERIES (formerly Corgus Chess)**

Chief Advisor: Garry Kasparov

Commissioning editor: Byron Jacobs

Typeset and edited by First Book Publishing, Brighton

Production by Book Production Services

Printed and bound in Great Britain by The Cromwell Press Ltd., Trowbridge,  
Wiltshire

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## Chapter One

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# The Dragon Variation

- The Yugoslav Attack
- The Classical Variation
- The Levenfish Attack
- White Plays g2-g3



1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nc3 Nf6 5.Nc2 g6 (Diagram 1)



Diagram 1

The starting position for the Sicilian Dragon

The Dragon Variation is the Sicilian in its most natural and logical form. Black develops his pieces on their most active squares. In particular, the Dragon bishop is fianchettoed on the long diagonal, where which it exerts its significant presence.

It's possible that the Dragon derived its name from the shape made by Black's pawns (and from the d4 to h4 files). Its name is certainly consistent with the type of chess it produces: aggressive, not direct and dynamic. That last of the Sicilians is not for the faint-hearted!

The Dragon has been around for over a century. It was first used in the 1890s by the renowned opening theorist Emanuel Lasker. Perhaps and it was also taken up by Harry Nelson Pillsbury, one of the world's leading players of the turn of the century. Nowadays it has support-ers at every level of chess and in 1998 it received an ultimate seal of approval when Garry Kasparov utilized it with great success in his world championship match with Visly Anand.

## The Yugoslav Attack

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nc3 Nf6 5.Nc2 g6 6.f4

This bishop move, further developing the queenside, signifies that White intends to play the Yugoslav Attack. This line (which is sometimes also referred to as the 'Russo Attack') occurred a few times in the 1890s in the Soviet Union and was later utilized by leading Yugoslav players.

I can safely say that the Yugoslav Attack is the ultimate test of the Dragon. White quickly develops his queenside and another long before turning his attention to an all-out assault on the black king. In the narrowest sense, this attack can look both serious and scary.

8...Bg7

Attacking the bishop with  $\text{d4}$ ,  $\text{Ng4}$  is a bad move as the reply  $\text{f5}$   $\text{White}$  was material after  $\text{e5}$   $\text{f5}$   $\text{Nc6}$   $\text{Nc3}$   $\text{h3}$   $\text{B-B2}$   $\text{Bd7}$   $\text{Bd8}$   $\text{e7}$   $\text{Bd7}$   $\text{g4}$  (the bishop is off or pinned).

**T 15**

Preventing the annoying possibility of  $\text{Ng4}$  and then preparing  $\text{Qd3}$  and  $\text{g4-g5}$ .

**T.2-4 is Qd3 Nc3 B-B2**

Another major possibility for  $\text{White}$  is the immediate  $\text{f5-g5}$ , not as pending time with the maneuver  $\text{Nc3-g3}$ . This can give  $\text{White}$  more time to realize his plans. However, this also gives  $\text{Black}$  the more space of an immediate strike on the center with  $\text{d5-d4}$  (see Game 2) **9...Bd7 10 g4-g5** (Diagram 2)



Diagram 2

A normal starting position in the Yugoslav Attack

## Strategies

**White** plans the following:

- 1) Press open the h-file with  $\text{h3-h4-h5}$  – perhaps supported by  $\text{g3-g4}$
- 2) Exchange off  $\text{Black}$ 's main defenders on the kingside. The  $\text{Dragon}$  bishop on  $\text{g7}$  can be exchanged with  $\text{Nc3-b4}$ . The defense knight on  $\text{B6}$  can be exchanged or eliminated in a number of ways – including  $\text{Nf5}$  and  $\text{g4-g5}$ .

Put another way – in the words of Bobby Fischer, ‘they open the h file and we mate!’

**Black** plans to gain counterplay on the queenside with moves such as  $\text{c6}$   $\text{Ra6-c6}$   $\text{Nb6-c6}$   $\text{d7-d5}$  and  $\text{Qd8-c8}$ . Sometimes  $\text{Black}$  sacrifices a rook for knight with  $\text{c6-b6}$ , disrupting the pawn structure around the white king. Defensively,  $\text{Black}$  can consider halting the advance of  $\text{White}$ 's h pawns with  $\text{h7-h6}$ . Although this allows  $\text{White}$  to continue an attack with  $\text{g4-g5}$ , this is sometimes more difficult to

average. If given time, Black may move the Knight, a point of which is to counter Bb7 with ...Bd7. This allows Black to keep the 'Dragon bishop', which does such a good job along the long diagonal both in its own and attack.

Compared to the other variations in the Dragon, the Yugoslav Attack is by far the most tactical and dynamic. Mixing combinations and sacrifices are the order of the day as both players go for an early kill. Positional play rarely enters the fray but is more likely if the queens are exchanged early. This can sometimes be achieved if an early ...Qd2 is answered by Nd2-d4, offering an exchange on d2.

## Theoretical?

The Yugoslav Attack is perhaps the most theoretically complex line of all openings. General principles are useful, but in this opening there is no substitute for learning the seemingly endless amount of critical variations. If you wish to play the Dragon then you need to be thoroughly prepared for all of White's options in the Yugoslav Attack. This means a lot of hard work, but the reward for the well prepared can be many easily obtained points.

## Statistics

Because of the excitement it brings, the Yugoslav Attack is fantastically popular at all levels of chess. The diagram position above has been reached literally thousands of times in international chess. According to *Chess Database 2002* its database of over two million top class games, White scores around 55%, just one per cent above even age! The most revealing statistic is that over 70% of all games in the Yugoslav are draws (the normal figure is around 55%).

## Illustrative Games

Game 1

White  Black

Round 194

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Bc4 Ng7 7 B2  
0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Nd7 10 0-0-0 Nc6

Beginning counterplay on the half-open side

10 ...Qd1 is another popular line, championed by the English grand-master and Dragon expert Chris Ward. In this variation Black plans to shift his B2 back to c1, thus allowing the option of meeting Bb7 with ...Bd7.

11 Bb2

Sensible play: The bishop moves out of the line of fire on the c-file.

11 ...Nc5

Defending the rook and preparing ... Nc6-c4.

12 ... Nc4

Here, since that's a point! Now Black has two major alternatives:

12 ... Nc4

Another major possibility for Black here is 12 ... Nd5 (see Game 2)

12 ... Bc7

It is generally better for White to give up the light squared bishop for the knight, the other bishop is needed to exchange off Black's Dragon bishop?

12 ... Bc7 14 Nd4

The move 14 g4 preparing h4-h5 without sacrifice, is also possible

**Exercise 3** What's wrong with the alternative 14 Bc7, allowing a trade of dark squared bishops?

12 ... Nc6 14 g4

The point: White has sacrificed a pawn to open the h file and gain time for the attack by leaving the knight.

14 ... Nf6 14 Bc7? (Diagram 3)



Diagram 3  
White after 14 Bc7



Diagram 4  
How does White continue?

This move leads to great complications.

14 ... Bc7?

It's a nice sign of a more sharp system when a natural looking move simply runs out of hand.

**WARNING** One slip by either side in the Toposium Attack is often decisive.

The move 15 ... Nc6? including the Dragon bishop, is an attack on d4, is the theoretical recommendation. Of course, there are an innumerable number of lines for both sides but, decades of experience has





shows that the critical line is 17 Qc2! Black (bolstering the pawns on the queenside) 18 h4! Nf6 19 Bg2? Bg2? makes a very unclear position. White is the exchange for a pawn ahead and still has chances to attack down the h-file. White's move here, however, is looking very easy and Black can unleash a quick counter with ... Qd3 and ... Rd3. Notice that 20-Qd3? Kd3? 21.g4 Nf4 defends for Black, for example 22. Rd4 g4h3 23. Bx3 Bg2 Bg2 24. Rd4 Bg2? and White's attack has reached a dead end.

#### 17 Qd3! Bc2

A logical response. Black gives up his rook for a knight in order to prevent Nf4 and ease the pawn structure around the white king. This is such a typical shot for Black in the Dragon. Here, unfortunately, it arrives too late.

#### 18 g4!

White simply ignores the rook, the attack down the h-file will be devastating.

#### 18...Nf4 (Dragon's q) 19 Bxh4!

Eliminating Black's final defender.

#### 19...g4h3 20 Bxh3

Dragon being a rook ahead, Black has no defense to the mating attack along the h-file.

#### 20...Qd3

Or 20... f4 21.g4! h4! 22.Qg4+ Kd3 23.Rd4 mate.

#### 21 Rxd3 Bf6 22 exf6 Bxh3- 23 Nxd3 Qd3 24 g4! Black resigns

A final tactic: 24... Qg2 25. Bg2 was the game and here too Black helplessly fell on material.

#### Game 2

Royal  German

Competition 1985

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3-d5 3.d4-cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3-g4 6.Bc4 Bg7 7.Bf1 Nd7 8.Qd3 9-f4 9.f4-e4 Bc4 Bb7 10.h4 Bb7 11.Bd3 h5 12.d4-d5 Nxb3

Via a slightly different move order, we've reached the same position where Black plays ... B7-h5, preventing White from playing h4-h5.

#### 12 Bg2

Moving the bishop to an active square and preparing kingside cast. Note: Of course, White has many ways to combat the attack, he can also continue with the ultra-aggressive 13.g4 or 13.Bf1, or play a preparatory defensive move such as 13.Bd1.

#### 12...Rd8

As well as pressure down the e-file, the rook can also be used for defensive purposes on the fourth rank.

#### 13.g4!



White gets 'all in'

14...h4! 15 Bc3?

A fundamental mistake: White sacrifices a black defender but now there will be no way of getting rid of Black's powerful Dragon bishop. **WRONG!** Be very wary of exchanging the dark-squared bishop for a knight in the Dragon. Unless this leads to something concrete, this is rarely a good idea (this applies to both White and Black).

Further meddling with 15 h4 leads to massive complications in the way forward.

16...h4! 16 h4 g4?

Refusing to open the h file.

17 Nf3 Bc4!

Another example of an effective exchange sacrifice: White's powerful knight is eliminated from the board.

18 e4!h4 g4! 19 c4 g4

White's attack has reached a dead end on the kingside. Slowly but surely, Black takes over the operation.

20 Kc1 Qh4 21 Bc3 Nc4 22 Qc1 Bc4 23 Nc4 Nc4! (Diagram 11)



Diagram 10  
Black has a winning tactic



Diagram 11  
White has a strong bishop on c4

Allowing a deadly combination

23...Nc4! 24 Kc1 Bc4! 25 Nc4 Bc4! 26 Nc4 Bc4! White resigns

Black moves after 23 h4! Bc4!, while White's position collapses after 24 Nc4 Q!

Game 2

□ White ■ Black

Carlsen-Sutovsky 2018

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 ex4 3 d4 exd4 4 Ng4! Nf6 5 Nc3 g4 6 Bc3 Bg7 7 Q2

**4-4 2-Qc7 Nc4 3-4-4**

White hopes to give time to set up the kingside attack by delaying (or leaving out) the development of the bishop to e4. If Black simply develops as normal this extra time can be very advantageous to White. **8...d5?**

This is what White's last move allows. Now there are some exchanges on the centre:

**10. e4! Nc6 11. Nc3 Nc4 12. Bc4**

The positional approach, offering the trade of dark squared bishops.

White has won a game here with 12. Nc3 with 13. Qc2, but after 13. Qc7 the open files on the queenside give Black plenty of attacking chances. Note that 14. Qc4 Bb7 was the game. After 15. Qc7+ Nc6 Black still has a strong attack.

**13. c5 14. Bb5 Bc7!**

Another typical offer of an exchange sacrifice on the Dragon.

**14. Nc4**

After 14. Bc7 Qc8 most experts agree that Black's attacking chances and dark square control more than make up for the slight material deficit. Note that Black already threatens ...Bb7, putting the white queen to the king. Indeed, Dragon expert and Grandmaster Edward Lasker has won at least once in this fashion!

**NOTE:** Exchange sacrifices are very common in the Yugoslav Attack.

**14...Bc7 15. g4 h4 16. h4 g5 17. g5 h4 18. e4 Qc7 19. Bc4 Bc6 20. Qc2 Qc7 21. h4** (Diagram 4)

Play is almost here! One in the other games in the Yugoslav, as both the kingside and the queenside are partially blocked.

**21...Nc6 22. Nc4 Nc6 23. Nc4!+ Nc6 24. Nc4 Bc7 25. Bc4 Nc6 26. Bc4 Qc7 27. Nc6+ Bc7 28. g4! Qc7**

A mistake. Correct is 26. Bb7, after which 26. Bb7? Nc6! 27. Bc4 Qc7+ 28. Kc2 Bc7 (Alamed) gives Black a winning attack.

**28. Bc4 e4! 29. Qc4! Qc2 30. Qc4!**

Now White is breaking through on the kingside.

**31...Qc2 32. Bc7 Bc6 33. Kc2 e4 34. Bc7! Black resigns.**

A nice combination to finish the game. White mates after both:

**34. Bc7 35. Qc7+ Kc6 36. Qc7** and **34... Bc7 35. Qc4 Bc6 36. Qc4+ Kc6 37. Qc7**

## The Classical Variation

---

**1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4-cxd4 4. Nd4 Nb8 5. Nc3 g6 6. Bc2**

While it's true that the Yugoslav Attack is the crucial test of the Dragon, playing in such a fashionable way does not suit everyone's

tures. For the most part, if you intend, the Classical Variation is an ideal choice. White simply develops in a 'classical' manner and orders his pawns.

### 5...Bg7 7 d4 Nd7 (Diagram 7)



Diagram 7

A starting position for the Classical



Diagram 8

A typical Classical position

Adding early pressure with d4. Now White must be wary of tactics such as Bb5.

This is logical, supporting the knight on d4, but let's also look at a couple of alternatives:

(1) f4? White requires to deal with the threat B...Nxd4 (including the power of the bishop's Nxd4 to Nxd4 also wins a pawn) 5...Qd6 10 Kd1 Nc7 10 h4! h4! and Black has won a total pawn.

**NOTE:** In the Dragon Black has many tactics available to exploit the pressure along the long a1-h8 diagonal.

(2) e3. Not chosen at once to move the knight away from the crossfile in the center. After 5...d4 White often continues with 6 Bg2, a line which was made popular by Kasparov in the late 1970s (see Game 1) 6...d4 6 Nbd2

Again removing the knight from the center. One alternative among early tactics for Black. A move waiting more such as f4!d4 is met in reply by the strategically desirable advance 6...d4. Following 10 Nbd2 11 Nc4! Qd6 12 Bb1 Qd6 13 Nc4! h4! 14 Nc4! Bf6 Black is extremely active.

Regaining a kingside safe square with 6 Nf3 looks logical, but Black can exploit the weaknesses in White's position with the dangerous 6...Qd4. The theory is rather complex but Black is more than holding his own.

**NOTE:** White should normally try to prevent the ...d4 advance. 6...Bd4 (Diagram 9)

A good square for the bishop, putting maximum pressure on the queenside

## Strategies

The stage is set for an interesting positional battle. White tries to keep a line gap on the central squares (especially d3) and can play aggressively with f3-f4-f5 and eventually g4-g5. These squares, however, are double-edged. If White is not careful then he can leave himself overextended and vulnerable to counter-attack.

Black's best chance of counterplay lies on the half-open c-file and the possibility of pushing the e- and f-pawns. He may seek to place a pawn on the desirable e4-square and this can be achieved, for example with .Nc3, .Nc3-g4 and .Nc3 (or f3-c3). As any sane Black will be looking to see if he can carry out a favourable .d4-d3 advance.

The Classical Variation gives rise to very much more strategic play than the Yugoslav Attack. White still concentrates mainly on the kingside but Black, on the other wing, has the important attacks are more restricted and are more of a space-gaining exercise rather than an all-out mating attack. The Classical appeals to more positionally-minded white players.

## Theoretical?

The Classical Variation is much less theoretical than the Yugoslav Attack and players are more likely to be able to get away with just playing on general principles.

## Statistics

Everything else aside in comparison to the popularity of the Yugoslav Attack, but it's safe to say that the Classical Variation comes a safe second. According to Mega Database 2005, Diagram 7 has been studied in over 1,200 games. Overall White scores around 49%, while 68% of the games are decisive.

## Illustrative Games

Game 4

Apollo  Iviter

Turkey (Spring 1994)

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 g5 6. Be2 Bg7 7. 0-0 Nc6 8. Nc3 a6 9. Bg5 e4

Black begins queenside operations.

10. f3 b4 11. Bf3

Threatening e4-e5, but Black has a natural response.

11... Bb7 12. Bb1

This is a common move in many Sicilian positions. The king launcher on f3 and White does not have to consistently calculate lines involving



21. Ra8? (was expected to be Qd4?)

22. Ne7 Ra8 23. Rd3 Ra7 24. Qd2 Rd8

The knight on d8 superficially looks unpleasant, but in fact, it's quite vulnerable and has no safe square to go to.

25. Qd3 Qd1 26. Qxd3 Ra3? Ra7 27. Rd3 Re4 28. Rd4 Rxd4 29. Rd3 Ra7 30. Rd7 31. Ra7 32. Ra8 33. Rd3 Ra7 White resigns.

Following 27. Ra8+ Black 28. Rd4 Ra8 29. Rd3 Ra7 30. Rd7 Ra7 the two bishops heavily restrict the work of the rook.

Game 3

□ Tillyard ■ Ooms

London 1994

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 ex4 3. d4 exd4 4. Nc3 Nf6 5. Nc4 g6 6. Be2 Bg7 7. f4 8. Nxd4 Bc8 9. d5 10. Nc3 Bb7 11. Bb2

White can play more aggressively with 13. Bc3, but after 13... Bf7 he must be careful not to overcommit. After 13. Bc3 Bf7 14. g4! Nc5 15. g5! Bc7 16. h4! Nxd4 Black's game becomes the best.

**NOTE:** The ...Nc5 exchange sacrifice is particularly effective if Black can also grab White's important central pawn.

11... Nd5

Planning to make use of the e4-square, Black can also keep his options open with 11... d6, with the idea of ... b7-b6-b5.

12. Bc3

Perhaps 12... Bc7 is stronger.

13. Bb4 Bf7 14. Bxd4 Bxd4 15. Qd3 Bc7 16. e4

White's extra open game has a small advantage.

18... a7 17. a4 Bc7 18. Nd4 Qd7?

18... Qc7 prevents White's next move.

19. Nf5! Bc8 20. exd5 Nxd5 21. Bg7! Bg7? 22. e4 Nc7 23. Qe4 Bb7 24. b4 (Diagram 16)

The pawn structure has changed as White's break. Black no longer has a crutch on the queenside and White is free to concentrate on kingside operations.

24... Bg7 25. b5 Bg7 26. Bb1 exf5 27. Bxf5 Bg8 28. Qd4 Bg7 29. Ne4 30. Nc3 Qc7 31. Ra7! Bc8 32. Ra7! Qd4 33. Nf5 Qd4 34. Nc3 Bc7 35. Bf5 Black Resigns.

## The Leverfish Attack

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 exd4 4. Nc3 Nf6 5. Nc4 g6 6. Be2 (Diagram 17)

The Russian Grandmaster Garry Lernerfish developed this tricky line in the 1990s as an alternative to the tried and tested Classical



Diagram 11

The starting position for the Levitskiy Attack

### 4...Nc6

4...Ng7 is the most natural move in the position, but this allows White to complicate matters with 5. e4 (see Game 6)

5. Nc3 h6! 6. e4 Nf7 6...a6! 7. e5

This leads us to Game 7

## Strategies

White hopes to catch Black off with an early advance of the centre. Aided by the f-pawn, White quickly pushes his e-pawn to e4, stalling any Blackside light and exposing Black a comfortable development. Black's strategy must be to get through the opening few moves with out any disasters occurring, which is sometimes easier said than done! However, if Black can negotiate these difficult early moves then he has a good chance of reaching a very promising position in the early middlegame.

The Levitskiy often begins with a flurry of tactics. However, once any Black gets through these without any harm, then the position can become rather tactical or strategic in nature.

## Theoretical?

Black players are advised to methodically learn an acceptable defence to the Levitskiy Attack. Refraining from this can lead to an early disaster and on this occasion one would rather not learn from an unpleasent experience!

## Statistics

The Levitskiy is not popular at the highest levels and there have been a very few grandmaster games in the past few years. At lower lev-





11. Nc3! or 12. Bc4 Bc7 13. b3 Nc6

By passing the knight to the bishop, Black regains her piece, but a little lack means that White remains a valuable pawn up.

14. Nc3? (Black 15. Nd5 Bc6 16. ex4 Nf6 17. Bg2 Bc7 18. Nc3 Bc4 19. Bc3 B3)

15. Bc4! (see material to 20-Bb3) – setting up a deadly pin.

20. Nc3+ Bc6

21. Bc7! allows mate in one with 21. Bb3.

21. Bc7? Nc3? 22. Bg4!

Black is forced to give up a piece – 21. Bc3 loses to 21-Bb3.

22. – Bc3 23. Bc7! or 24. Nc3 Nc4 25. Bc3+ Bg7 26. Nc3+ Bc7 27. Nc3+ Bc7 28. Nc3+ Black resigns.

Game 7

□ Bg2 ■ Castles

Score: 100

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nc3 Nf6 5. Nc3-g4 6. Bc4 Nc6!

To a certain extent, this move needs the tracks.

7. Nc3!

Or 7. Bc4 Bc7 8. Bc3! (not 8. e4 Nf6 10. Nc3! cxd4 11. exd4 e5) (White) and Black follows up with ... Bc6!

White can play in a quiet manner with 7. Nc3!, but this poses no real threat to the black position. Play is level after 7... Bg7 8. Bc3 9-0 9-0 Bc6 Bg2.

7... Bc6! 8. e5!

White seizes on the central breakthrough.

8... Nc7 9. exd6 cxd6 10. Qc4!

By attacking the rook in the centre and preparing to cast in queenside, White keeps up the pace. Obviously, 10. Bc2 is safer but hardly true threat for Black.

10... Nf6 11. Bc4-Bc7!

An unusual manoeuvre in the Sicilian, the bishop is developed on a7 rather than g7! However, there is a good reason: after 11... Bg7 12 B-0 0-0 13. Qc4! Black has problems casting.

12. 0-0 0-0 13. 0-0

Preventing Ng4.

13... d5 14. Nc3!

Preventing Nd5, but Black gets on d5!

14... Nc7! (Diagram 13)

This is a powerful outpost for the black knight.

15. Bc2 Bc6!

Black now has a very ambitious attack on the queenside, with moves such as ...Qd1, ...Nc1 and ...Bb1 springing to mind. White's next moves, involving a pawn to clear lines, consist of:

18 Bb2 19 Bb1 20 Bb2 21 Qd1 22 Bb1 23 Qd2 24 Bb1 25 Bb2+ 26 Kc1 27 Bb1 28 Qd1 29 Qd2 30 Qd1 31 Qd2 32 Bb1 33 Bb2+ 34 Qd1 35 Qd2 36 Bb1 37 Bb2+ 38 Qd1 39 Qd2+ 40 Kc1 41 Qd1+ 42 Kc2 43 Qd1

It's mate after 44 Bb2 Bb2+ 45 Kc1 Qd1+ 46 Kc2 Qd1

## White Plays g2-g3

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d5 3 Bc4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g5 6 g2-g3 (Diagram 14)



Diagram 14

The starting position for the g2 variation.

This introduces a positional and sophisticated system of development which is, however, considered by most to be quite harmful against the Dragon. White expects an early tempo to develop the knight's bishop to g2 where it will be blocked by the ro-pawn. When put like this, it is surprising that this line has gained any popularity at all. However, as we shall see below, there are some interesting features to this method of development.

4...Nc6 5 Nbd4

For 7 Bg2, Nbd4 8 Qd1 Bg7 9 O-O O-O, see Game 8.

7...Bg7 8 Bg2 9-O-O 8-O

## Strategies

For most in the Dragon, White's play is not restricted by an attack on the black king. Instead, White normally aims for positional pressure on the centre.

The bishop on g2 overprotects the e4 pawn. This allows White's knight on c3 to move and a common idea for White is to play Nc1-d3,

which can prove to be of great importance value. If Black captures on d3 then White normally responds with the e4 pawn, offering him the chance to initiate the newly formed half-open-file. If instead Black attacks the knight with a7-a6 then this leaves the d3-pawn slightly vulnerable.

Again Black looks to the queenside for counterplay, although he must be careful not to advance his queenside pawns too early as this only gives White to initiate his light-squared bishop with e4-e5. Rather than responding to an exchange when the white knight reaches d3 Black generally tries to play around it before starting it with a timely a7-a6 (see Game 16).

## Theoretical?

The g3 line of the Dragon is hardly theoretical and is often played by players who are looking to avoid a heavy-weight theoretical battle. There are only one or two variants which need to be learnt.

## Statistics

I would have said that this is not a particularly popular line, but I did find just over a thousand examples of Dragon: f4 in *Chess Database 2002* with White scoring a surprisingly high 60%. So perhaps g3 is an underestimate and more against the Dragon?

At lower levels, however, I would suspect that this line is less popular but as most players are lured by the rewards and the compliments of the Yugoslav and Levitskiy Attacks.

## Illustrative Games

### Game 8

Adams  Kramnik

Wp: 20-26 1998

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3

White employs an unusual move order, but eventually we reach an Open Rookside.

5. d4 f4 6. d4-c4 8. Nc3 f Nf3 8. g3 g3

What started off as a Closed Rookside, has now transitioned into a Dragon.

**NOTE:** There are many transpositional possibilities in the Sicilian Defense.

7. Bg2 Nc4

It's quite unusual for Black to exchange knights so early, but here Black believes that the queen may become vulnerable on d3.

8. Qc2 d3 8. g3? 8. g4 8-8 10. Qc4??

Prophetic? Thinking, White moves the queen from d3 before Black



has a chance to take advantage of it. However, it turns out that the queen is just as vulnerable as that square. What should White do: *10...d6?* *10...d5?* *10...Qd7?* or *10...Qd8?*...

**NOTE:** Prophylaxis is the strategic idea of anticipating or preventing an opponent's threat before it exists.

*10...a6!* *11...Qd7* *12...d6!* (Diagram 18)



**Diagram 18**

Forcing the queen to grab a hot pawn



**Diagram 19**

Black creates a chance to complicate

Black offers a pawn sacrifice, tempting the queen deep into enemy territory

*13...d5!*

After *13...Qd7* *14f7*, as return for the pawn, Black is very active and White's queen is vulnerable

*13...a6!*

Forcing the queen

*13...Qd7* *14...d6!* *14...a6!* *15...*

White is a pawn up, but it's Black who stands better: Both the *d5*- and *f7*-pawns are vulnerable and White's queen is not well placed on *f7*

*15...Rg6* *Qd4!*

Even the rookgame will favour Black

*16...Qd4* *16...f6!* *17...Rg7* *18...d6!* *19...a6!*

Or *16...Rg6* *16...f6!* *16...Rg7* *16...f6!* (Kramnik) and Black's passed pawn is stronger than White's.

*19...Rg6* *19...Rg7* *19...*

Preventing the vital *d6*-pawns. Now the major weakness is the position is White's *a6*-pawns

*20...Rg4* *20...f6!* *20...Rg6* *20...d6!* *21...Rf6!*

*22...Rg7* limits the damage

*23...Rg7!*

Now the  $\pi$  game is lost. (Note that  $\pi$ ,  $\text{Nee}^{\text{TM}}$  allows  $\pi$   $\text{Nee}^{\text{TM}}$  with an unstoppable mate on  $\text{a8}$ .)

15. **Ra1 Ra2** 16. **Rd1 Rd2** 17. **Rc1 Rc2** 18. **Rb1 Bb1**

Black returns the pawn to reach a technically winning endgame.

17. **Ra2 a3** 18. **Ra1 a2** 19. **Rc1 a3** 20. **White resigns**

There is no hope. For example, 20. **Ra2 Nf7** 21. **Kc2 Ke7** 22. **Kd3 Kd8** 23. **Kc4 b4** 24. **Kc5 Kc4** 25. **Kd5 Kc5** 26. **Kc6 Kc4** 27. **Kb5 Kc7** 28. **Ra2 Ra3** 29. **Kc2 Kc3** and the black king picks up the white pawns.

Game 2

**White**  **Black**

Date: 1987

1. **e4 e5** 2. **Nf3 d5** 3. **exd5** 4. **Nc3 N7e6** 5. **Nc2 Nc6** 6. **Nd2 g5** 7. **g3** 8. **Bg2** 9. **Bg3** 10. **h4** 11. **Bb1**

Preparing queenside castling with ... $\text{N7e6}$ .

12. **exd5** 13. **Nd3**

Copying the square with the knight is very much normal procedure in the  $\text{g3}$  line.

13...**h4**

14. **Nd2**  $\text{N7e6}$  15. **exd5** improves the pawn structure in White's favour. The pawn on  $\text{d5}$  is a slight threat in Black's position, and the  $\text{e5}$ -pawns could eventually become exposed due the half-open  $\text{e}$  file.

15...**exd5** 16. **h4**

White wants to play  $\text{Bc1}-\text{a3}$  without the hassle of having to worry about  $\text{Ng5}$ .

16...**h4** 17. **Bd1 Nd7**

Black is ready to meet the knight with ... $\text{a7-a6}$ .

18. **Qc1**

Including the  $\text{h4}$ -pawns. Note that after 18. **Nd3** Black can win a pawn in a surprising way: 18... **Ba4** (Black swaps off his pawn and plays for ...  $\text{g5}$ ) 19. **h4** 20. **h5** 21. **Ne2** 22. **h4** 23. **h5** and the bishop on  $\text{a7}$  is trapped.



**Tip:** Do not dismiss strange looking moves—they may be both strange and good!

18...**exd5** 19. **Nd3** 20. **Qc2** 21. **Ra2 N7e6** 22. **Nd2 Bc1** 23. **h4** 24. **h5** 25. **h4** (Diagram 18)

26...**Nd3**

Here Black could have played 26... **Nc5**, hitting both the pawns on  $\text{e4}$  and the one on  $\text{h4}$ . Malakhov gives the following line: 27. **Nd3 Bc2** 28. **Bc2 Nc5** 29. **Nd5 Nd3** 30. **Nc7** 31. **Nc5** 32. **Ra2** 33. **h4** with a very nice clear position.

31. **Rd1 Nd3**

Not good. Black sacrifices his  $\text{h4}$  pawn but his calculations are flawed.

28 Nxb4 Nb5 29 Nd4 Bxc4 30 Bxc4 Bxb4

24...Nc4 allows 25 Nc4, linking pawns and rook.

26 Nc4 Qc6 27 Qc3 Nc4?

25...Qc4? 27 Qc3! Nc4! was the last chance.

27 Bxc4 Rxc4 28 Bc3! Black resigns

28...Qc4 29 Bxc4 Qc4 30 Bc3 and White is a rook ahead for an ex-emptious two pawns

## Summary

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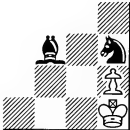
- 1) The Sicilian Dragon is for brave souls. If White plays the dreaded Yugoslav Attack then both players can look forward to a bloodbath by both.
- 2) White players of a more peaceful nature will be advised to play either the Classical or the g3 variation.
- 3) The Londonish Attack contains less of early trials and black players need to remember a reliable defence against this.
- 4) The g3 variation is deceptive – also better than it looks!

## Chapter Two

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# The Najdorf Variation

- **The Main Line: 6 Bg5**
- **The English Attack**
- **White Plays Be2**





# Starting out the sicilian

Level for those wanting to understand the basics of the Sicilian

The Sicilian Defence is perhaps the most famous opening in the history of chess, and it is certainly the most popular at every level, from the first steps Black plays. No stone is too small and eventually an asymmetrical pawn structure. Its greatest attraction is that it allows Black to introduce the position and play for a win, without having to take any unjustified risks. The many variations of the Sicilian range from the super-solid Scheveningen to the dangerous and ultra-sharp Dragon, so it should be easy to find one that suits your style. In this user-friendly book, Grandmaster John Emms gives book to basics, studying the fundamental principles of the Sicilian Defence in its numerous different guises. Throughout the book there are an abundance of notes, tips, warnings and exercises to help the improving player, while key strategies, ideas and tactics for both sides are clearly illustrated.

- ✔ User-friendly design to help readers absorb ideas
- ✔ Concentrates on the key principles of the Sicilian
- ✔ Ideal for the improving player

John Emms is one of Britain's strongest Grandmasters and is a member of the English national team. He has had many works to his name, including *The Survival Guide to Chess Strategy* and *Dealing with Draw*, while he is also a co-author of the very popular opening bible *How to Chess*.



ISBN 978 1 85082 924 6

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Published in the UK by Everyman Publishing  
Distributed in the US by the Stone Paper Press

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